

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Former State Employee Receives Jail Term for Theft

(Phoenix, Ariz. – June 27, 2007) Attorney General Terry Goddard announced that Wilma Batala-Pete, 45, of Snowflake, was sentenced today to eight months in jail and ordered to pay \$14,500 in restitution to the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) after pleading guilty to one count of theft.

Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Arthur T. Anderson also sentenced Batala-Pete to four years of supervised probation. She will be required to notify any future employer of the nature of her conviction.

Batala-Pete, a former DES employee, worked in the Jobs Program which provides general assistance to low-income clients as they transition from public assistance to economic independence. The assistance includes help in purchasing clothing and paying rent and other living expenses as the clients maintain employment. Clients are issued vouchers to help pay for these expenses.

Between July 2003 and June 2005, Batala-Pete initiated nine bogus vouchers, requesting checks for various clients to cover living expenses. She either forged her clients' names on the vouchers or had the clients sign blank vouchers which she later filled in. The nine vouchers totaled \$14,500. Batala-Pete used this money to pay her own rental expenses and attorney's legal fees for representing her on criminal bad check charges.

Batala-Pete's conviction was the result of ongoing efforts by the Attorney General's Office and the DES Office of Internal Affairs to investigate and prosecute employees who defraud the State. Assistant Attorney General Chris Wilson prosecuted this case.

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